

Message Text

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61

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9966

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN, PQ

SUBJ: PRESS REACTION TO BUNKER COMMENTS ON TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

1. THE FEBRUARY 28 AND MRCH 1 EDITIONS RESPECTIVELY OF THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED EL PANAMA AMERICA AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PANAMA AMERICAN HAVE PROMINENTLY FEATURED WASHINGTON DATELINE UPI REPORT OF AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S REMARKS TO AMERICAN UNIVERSITY TELEVISION ON THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. BOTH PAPERS GIVE STORY LEAD ARTICLE TREATMENT, WITH SPANISH EDITION FEATURING BUNKER'S PICTURE UNDER A HEADLINE QUOTING THE AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENT THAT THE U S "COULD BE CONFRONTED WITH GRAVE PROBLEMS IF IT REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE A NEW TREATY." THE ENGLISH PAPER IN TURN ENTITLED ITS ARTICLE "BUNKER STRESSES NECESSITY FOR NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATY." FOR ITS PART, MATUTINO COMMENTED EDITORIALY IN ITS MARCH 1 "BLACK AND WHITE" COLUMN THAT THE AMBASSADOR'S VIEWS REPRESENTED A "REALISTIC VISION" AND NOTED, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE CRITICS WHO CONSIDER THE GOP'S STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY TO BE "DEMAGOGIC", THE AMERICAN DIPLOMAT'S WARNING THAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES NOT CONTINUE FORWARD WITH THE NEGOTIATIONS, US-PANAMANIAN RELATIONS "WILL REACH A MARKED DEGREE OF INSTABILITY BECAUSE THIS IS A NATIONAL-IST MATTER WHICH WILL NOT DISAPPEAR IN PANAMA."

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2. COMMENT. THE PROMINENT COVERAGE ACCORDED AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S COMMENTS BY THE GOP CONTROLLED PRESS REFLECTS NOT ONLY PANAMANIAN INTEREST IN THEIR SUBSTANCE BUT ALSO THE GOP'S CONTINUING NEED TO DEMONSTRATE DOMESTICALLY THAT THE US IS GIVING THE NEGOTIATIONS SUSTAINED HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION. INDEED, THE GGOP CAN BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN SENSITIVE TO ANY INDICATIONS THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE SLIPPED IN US PRIORITIES FOLLOWING THE SECRETARY'S VISIT AND THE SUBSEQUENT LOW-KEY TREATMENT OF THE CANAL ISSUE IN MEXICO CITY.
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